

Ontario Court of Justice
 Cour de justice de l'Ontario
 311 Jarvis



COLIN MCCONNELL/TORONTO STAR

Scott Graham leaves youth courthouse at 311 Jarvis Street in downtown Toronto last month.

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centres where they're re-traumatized, thrown in solitary confinement ("seclusion") and forcibly drugged for alleged "mental illness," we should provide a wide range of challenging and empowering alternatives: more youth-run drop-ins, community centres, 24/7 walk-in crisis centres, food and housing co-ops, camps, sensitive and creative teachers, tutors and counselors, since many youth have had degrading school experiences and been labeled "a failure."
 Let's start listening to, understanding, and showing respect for kids in crisis, rather than punishing them as hardened adult criminals.
Don Weitz, Toronto

caused serious harm and their behaviour should be treated seriously. Many others are scooped into the justice system for fairly minor offences. There is also a brief reference to the "alarming" number of youth before the court who come from damaged families and who are "angry, hurt and helpless."
 What is disturbing is that we are not using this information to address the problem and instead are engaging in a discussion about whether these kids are "coddled," followed by another major article about what information reporters should be allowed to access.
 Why is helping youths get off this merry-go-round of misery not the

This insightful but depressing series of investigative articles truly highlight how we as a society have failed our youth and their families. The combination of nearsighted, harsh conservative policies of the Harper and Ford administrations, and the prevalence of rampant corporate greed have only exacerbated the spiral of poverty, frustration and alienation of our young people.

Save our youth — save our future.
Charles Evans, Toronto

As a former younger offender of over 30 years ago (before the term existed in Canadian jurisprudence) and now a lawyer, your rush to judgment as to the causes of youth at risk to offend, unfortunately, are simplistic, judgmental and based on paternalistic stereotypes.

The reasons why young people become involved in criminal activity are far more complicated than a kid simply coming from a broken home. In my case, I came from an affluent, small-town nuclear family with a mother and father married for over 50 years. I had relatively good grades and seemingly lots of opportunities. In spite of this, I was in and out of the criminal justice system as an offender for a number of years. Why I would offend was a mystery to everyone.

Additionally, your reporter's observation that most young people charged with serious violent crimes are avoiding jail time belies the evidence that many youthful offenders are actually spending more time in jail in pre-trial custody. "Dead time," while legally not a sentence, is still jail time. In fact, dead time defeats the goals and purposes of the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Dead time is jail time and it is imposed at a time when a youthful offender is still entitled to the presumption of innocence and without the opportunity for programming and/or early release.

Kathryn L. Smithen, Barrister & Solicitor, Toronto

Canadians do not want harsh justice, but many have lost faith in judges' ability to consistently render reasonable justice. By and large they will accept what the government proposes, even if they believe it goes too far the other way.